Question Responses

Indiana Main Street targeted the 165 communities currently involved in the state program. Staff made multiple contacts with communities by mail and phone and received responses from 104 people representing 102 communities. When examined by DOC region, participation in the survey varied between 53 percent in Region 6 around Terre Haute, to 87 percent in Region 9 around Madison and Region 4 around Kokomo.

The first question asked for an overall impression of how things have changed downtown in the past 10 years. As the top graph shows, an encouraging 53 percent said their areas had become more vibrant.

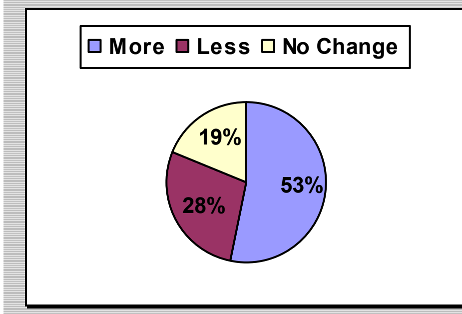
The second group of questions examined local downtown development efforts. The tables at right show that many people thought community support was stronger than business support.

In fact, more people ranked community participation stronger than any other category. Downtown development volunteers also ranked highly with 25 percent of respondents, indicating strong support.

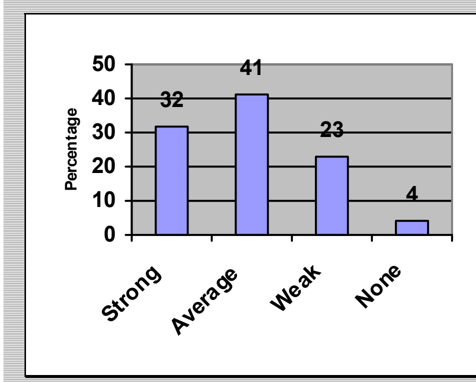
On the other end of the scale, new business recruitment ranked lowest: only 13 percent rated it as strong; 51 percent ranked support as "weak" or "none." Dependable funding scored second lowest: only 16 percent said they had strong funding support.

Hired staff support also was identified as a problem: only 17 percent said it was strong in their community.

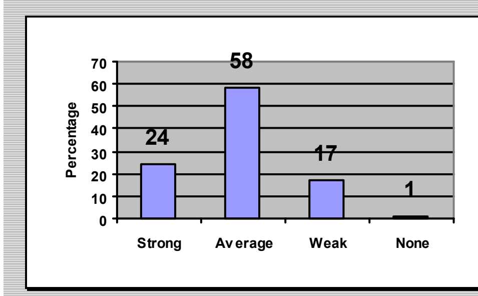
Is Downtown More Vibrant?



Community Participation



Business Support



The third group of questions asked about the types of development tools used by communities. Sixteen different development tools representing the four points of Main Street were listed. As shown at right, more than half of the respondents used 9 of the 16 methods.

The most-used tool–by 86 percent–was providing information to prospective businesses. Most people also had a system in place to inform the media about downtown development news.

A smaller majority tracked downtown vacancy rates, had up-to-date plans for guiding growth and had regulations in place for signage, design guidelines or other issues.

A lower percentage indicates less use of that development tool. The most common missing piece was a downtown special funding district; only 25 percent indicated use of this tool. More than half said there has not been any public-private partnership for building rehabilitation.

One tool that was noticeably absent from most of the respondents was providing incentives such as grants or loans for business improvement. Only 40 percent indicated this tool is used.

Some small incongruities show up in the results. For example, 59 percent said retail businesses work together to create special sales events, but only 42 percent report that they have efforts to attract specific types of customers.

And while 67 percent said there is a system to alert media, 42 percent said there are no regular reports on downtown progress.

Development Tools in Use

Prospect information .. 86%

Media contact system . 67%

Retail business events . 59%

Meet with business and property owners 58%

Track vacancy rates ... 58%

Design regulations 56%

Current work plan 56%

Events calendar......... 53%

Work with outside resources 52%

2nd story development . 47%

Business directory 45%

Customer recruitment . 42%

Progress reports 42%

Business incentives..... 40%

Public-private partnerships for development........ 38%

Special funding district 25%

The fourth group of questions asked about specific groups which support downtown development.

Of the 11 choices, only four were listed as major supporters of local efforts by 50 percent or more of respondents.

Those four were the chamber of commerce (79 percent), government (70 percent), downtown businesses (56 percent), and local Main Street organizations (54 percent).

After combining the people who answered "yes" or "somewhat," the positive ratings jump much higher: chamber of commerce (90 percent), government (94 percent), downtown businesses (93 percent), and local Main Street organizations (72 percent).

Groups that got the fewest votes for supporting downtown efforts were downtown residents (26 percent), the real estate community (31 percent), large employers (34 percent), and community foundations (40 percent).

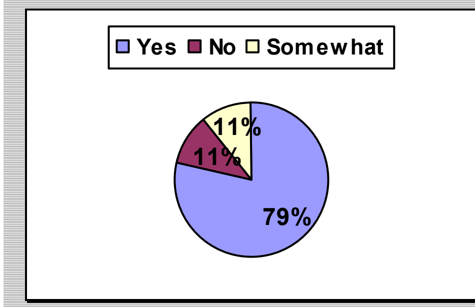
The fifth question asked respondents to list the best thing about their downtown.

There was a large range of answers, but a few assets popped up repeatedly, including terms like quaint or small or historic architecture.

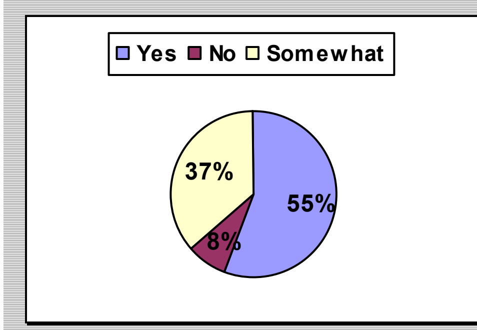
Many people were proud of local downtown revitalization efforts and of their clean city, as well as of local landmarks such as a courthouse.

Other assets were specific to certain towns, such as being located near a scenic river or busy highway

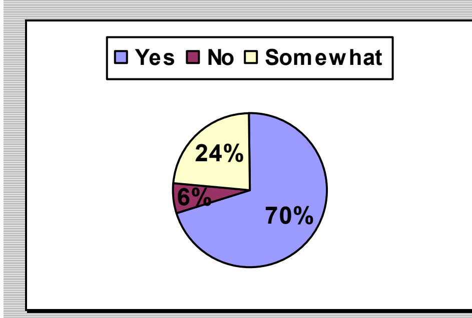
Do Chambers Support Development Efforts?



Do Downtown Businesses Support Development Efforts?



Does Government Support Development Efforts?



Question Six asked respondents to identify the first problem that should be tracked downtown. Although there was a variety of responses, some themes can be detected.

For instance, many people referred to apathy and few organized efforts for downtown revitalization. Specifically, they called for more strategic planning or, at least, a unified effort to address problems.

Respondents indicated that the most noticeable troubles included first and second floor vacancies. The flip side of this problem, inadequate recruitment and retention efforts, was also mentioned.

Respondents cited a need for more building renovations, specifically façade improvements. Parking and traffic flows problems were also listed, but not as frequently as other issues. In general, most of the concerns boiled down to the lack of resources to get things done.

Part B of the survey asked about training and services needed to support development. Respondents picked items within broad categories corresponding to the four points of Main Street.

Respondents were asked to pick their top three overall training needs within the next twelve months.

The top table at right shows those which were most frequently mentioned, including help with new business retention and expansion (cited by nine percent). The next most frequent categories were small business retention and creating an effective image for downtown.

The least requested services included effective media and public relations campaigns and creating a not-for-profit organization.

Most Requested Training Needs in the Next 12 Months

- **New business attraction and development**
- **Creating an image for downtown**
- **Small business retention and expansion**
- **Building support for downtown development**

Least Requested Training Needs in the Next 12 Months

- **Effective media/public relations**
- **Creating a non-profit organization**
- **Evaluating your downtown development effort**
- **Using marketing information in promotion**
- **Using market analysis in downtown development**
- **Strategies for technology-based economic development**
- **Store display and merchandising**

Respondents were also asked what training topics would be helpful within the next three years. For this question, they ranked items in each of the four categories – organizational issues, marketing and promotion, economic issues and design issues.

The four tables at right detail which items were most frequently requested. Of all the topics, new business recruitment and small business retention received the most votes overall.

Some choices received noticeably more votes as three-year concerns than they did as 12-month concerns. For example, only five percent said help with streetscapes, signage and other public improvements would be important in the next year. However, 21 percent would like to see it covered within the next three years.

A similar priority was given to parking, the Indiana Department of Transportation, and other, transportation issues.

Some topics did not attract much interest from respondents either as one-year or three-year issues. These include staff and board development, strategic planning, using market analysis in downtown development, store displays and merchandising, and effective media/public relations.

When asked about other training topics that might be useful, the most frequently mentioned were grant research and building public-private partnerships.

Top Two Organization Training Needs in the Next 3 Years

- Building support for downtown development
- Advanced fundraising (special districts, taxes, and endowments)

Top Two Promotion Training Needs in the Next 3 Years

- Creating an image for downtown
- Designing effective retail promotions

Top Two Economic Restructuring Training Needs in the Next 3 Years

- New business attraction and development
- Small business retention and expansion

Top Two Design Training Needs in the Next 3 Years

- Maintaining and rehabilitating buildings
- Streetscapes, signage, and other public improvements
  (TIED WITH)
- Parking, INDOT, and other transportation issues

Summary of Indiana Main Street Survey

Question 9 asked how the communities would prefer the Indiana Main Street program to provide training.

The most popular choice, at 84 percent, was for on-site technical assistance. The next most requested was receiving information through a newsletter. Electronic training and regional training sessions within 50 miles also ranked highly.

Respondents indicated that receiving in-depth training at statewide meetings or Indiana Main Street exchange meetings is not convenient.

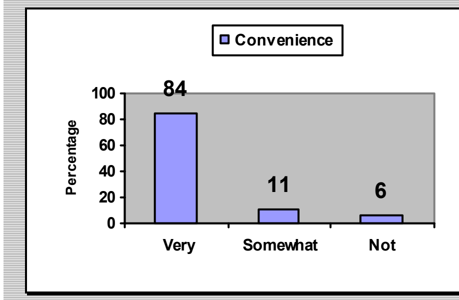
Question Ten asked about usage of the various services offered by Indiana Main Street. Eighty-four percent of respondents have used Indiana Main Street publications, while only 18 percent of respondents indicated they had ever used the Main Street library.

Surprisingly, the second least-used service was on-site technical assistance, which–in a previous question–was the most requested item. Respondents may not be aware that the Main Street program will provide technical assistance if requested.

Respondents who said they had used the various services were then asked if they found them helpful. In this category, publications were the most popular item, as shown in the bottom table. They were followed by the conferences, staff, and Community Exchanges.

The last question asked participants for any additional comments. No overwhelming theme surfaced, but some remarks were repeated a few times. These include thanks to Main Street for their efforts and a wish by participants to be more involved in Main Street's programs.

On-Site Technical Assistance



Least-Used Main Street Services

Library	18%
On-site assistance	39%
Community Exchanges	49%

Most Useful Main Street Services

Publications	79%
Conferences	62%
Staff (inquiries, etc.)	58%
Community Exchanges	47%